Research in Review Webinar: Online Student Experiences and Expectations

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Goals and Objectives

- Introduce the research with students at the North Carolina Virtual Public School

- Focus on key takeaways from the research for students, teachers, and administrators

- Hear your experiences, perceptions, and questions

About North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS)

- Began offering courses in Summer 2007
- 2012 enrollment was second highest of any virtual school in the US
- Options include AP, Honors, Traditional, Credit Recovery, and Occupational Course of Study
- Mostly asynchronous interaction

About the Study

- Why we became interested in NCVPS as a case study and in learning about students
- Student survey (modeled after our teacher survey, interviews, and focus group)
  - Large-scale student survey – 24 questions, mix of demographic, closed-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions

About the Participants

- Taking first few online classes (1 - 3) - 91.8%
- Also taking classes in a F2F building - 91.7%
- Range in age from 12 to 19 – 86.7%
- Mostly traditional students
- n=174 students to date

What are NCVPS Students Saying about their Online Experiences?

- 90% communicate directly with their online teacher
- 80% state their online teachers have specific expectations for their participation
- 80.6% say they are able to meet the challenge

Takeaway #1: Benefits are intertwined with challenges

Challenges

- Easier to get distracted

- Difficult without a teacher at all times to clarify instructions and to give constant reminders

- Some questions to teachers were not answered in a timely manner

- Connectivity issues

- Challenging to get oriented to the NCVPS and to the tools and techniques required

Takeaway #1:
Benefits are intertwined with challenges

Benefits

- Freedom to do their school work whenever and wherever they wanted

- A new-found sense of autonomy and responsibility

- Ability to take coursework not available in their school

- Ability to finish school when traditional schools were not working for them

- Getting a taste of the college experience

Student Comment:

"I had to change my ways of thinking. In the past I would be motivated be [sic] the teachers in the classroom but with an online learning I had to motivate myself, which was a learning experiment that I will use all though [sic] life."

Takeaway #2:
Students find instructor involvement essential, yet many feel they ultimately determine their own success

- 91.1% of students stated Instructor Involvement is very important or important to their online learning.
- Many called themselves the important part of the process.

Takeaway #2:
Students find instructor involvement essential, yet many feel they ultimately determine their own success

- The teacher survey data suggested that teachers think they are what determines a successful learning experience

- Teachers and students need to determine roles and responsibilities, including how quickly students can expect a response from their teacher

Student Comment:

"Instructor involvement is very important because she is the one who tell us how and what to do, when to do it, what it should include, etc. She is our guide so we learn properly, and she also provides the knowledge we need to suceed [sic] in the course. She is also the most helpful person available."

Takeaway #3: Administrators can ease the student transition with orientation, training, and "how to" videos

- 73.3% of students stated they did not have anyone teach them strategies or skills to help them learn online before they started their class.

Student Comments:

"One challenge I've experieced *[sic]* is navigating around and getting to know how your teacher wants things."

"It is really hard doing NCVPS for the first time while having no clue what to do."

Future Research Areas and Next Steps

- How can we encourage student participants, within ethical research protocols, to provide more detailed information on surveys and to participate in interviews and focus groups?

- What will longitudinal data show?
  - New survey this month
  - Changes and additions

Future Research Areas and Next Steps

- How can this research inform practice at NCVPS and other schools?

- How can virtual school practice inform the research conducted?

  - Does the focus change for specific populations?
  - Are there specific needs of schools and districts?

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Comments, Questions, and References

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References:

Garrett Dikkers, A., Whiteside, A. L., & Lewis, S. (2013, Winter). Virtual high school teacher and student reactions to the Social Presence Model. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 12*(3), p. 156-170.

Garrett Dikkers, A., Whiteside, A.L., & Lewis, S. (2012, September/October). Get present: Build community and connectedness online. *Learning and Leading with Technology 40*(2).

Reminders

- If you or anyone you know is a K-12 online and blended learning researcher, please add your/their information to this Google Doc - http://bit.ly/1dJcEvt

- If you have anything research related that you'd like to share with the rest of the research community, please consider sharing it on the iNACOL Research in Review blog – http://researchinreview.inacol.org. Send content to kkennedy@mivu.org.

- If you're interested in joining the iNACOL Research Committee, please contact Dr. Rob Darrow at rdarrow@inacol.org.

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